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Tuesday
February 24, 2026

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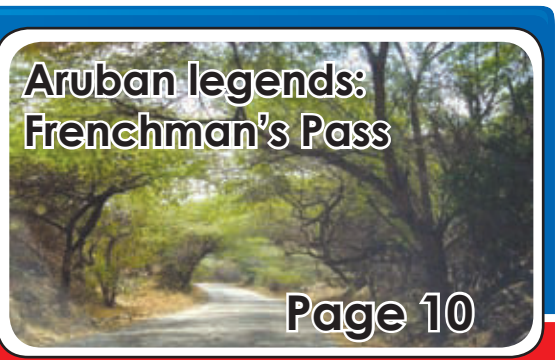
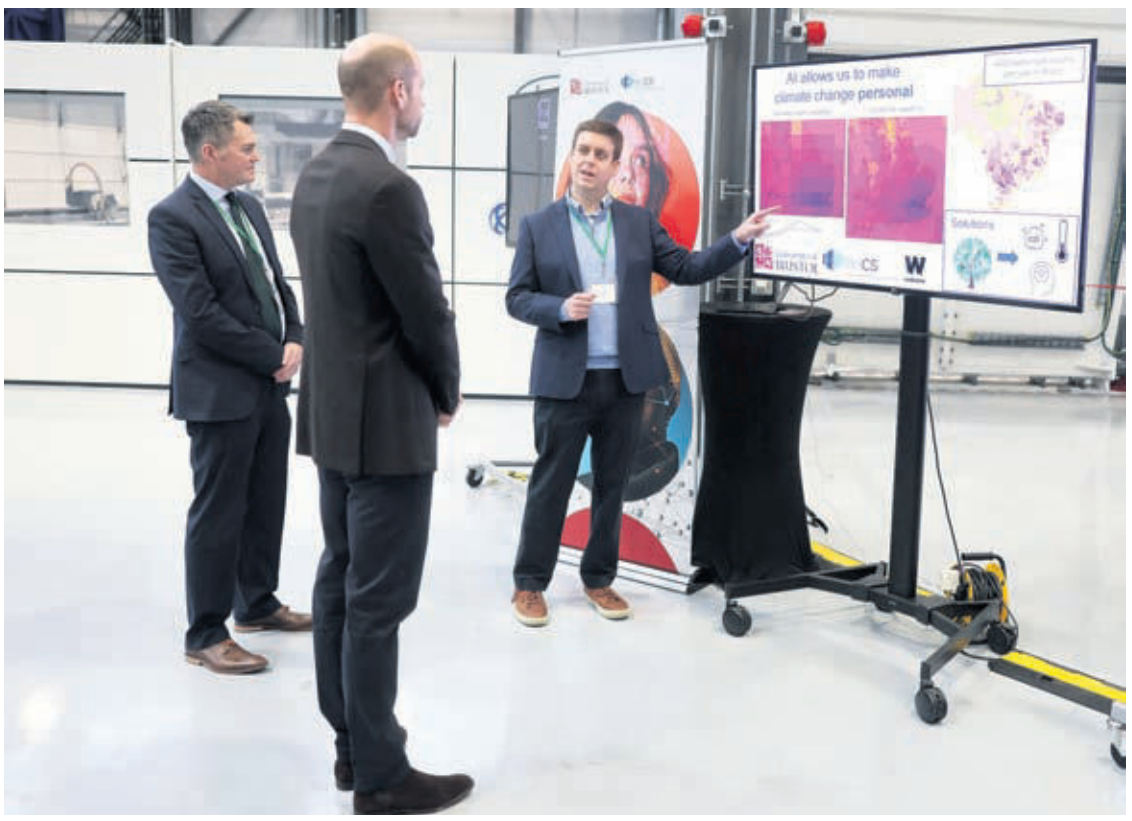


Conchi: Aruba's hidden natural pool

Engaging the brain may help delay Alzheimer's onset

In an era where neurological health is at the forefront of medical research, a landmark study has provided a powerful "prescription" for the aging brain: curiosity. New research suggests that lifelong learning and consistent mental stimulation can delay the onset of Alzheimer's disease symptoms by as much as five years, offering a significant window of high-quality life to millions of people.



Britain's Prince William, Prince of Wales listens to a scientist during a visit to Isambard-AI, the UK's most powerful supercomputer, who are exploring how the supercomputer can help develop new drugs to combat heart disease and Alzheimer's, during a visit to the University of Bristol in the city of Bristol, south-west England, on January 22, 2026.

The Cognitive Reserve: Building a "Brain Buffer"

The core of this discovery lies in a concept scientists call "Cognitive Reserve." Think of the brain like a physical muscle; just as physical exercise builds bone density and muscle mass to protect against injury, mental exercise builds a dense network of neural pathways.

When Alzheimer's or dementia begins to physically affect the brain, individuals with a high cognitive reserve have "backup routes." Their brains are essentially "wired" to work around the damage, allowing them to maintain memory and cognitive function long after the physical markers of the disease have appeared.

Key Findings of the Study

Researchers tracked thousands of seniors over several decades, monitoring their levels of "cognitive activity"—ranging from reading and writing to playing games and attending classes. The results were striking:

The Five-Year Delay: Individuals who engaged in high levels of mental activity in old age developed symptoms of dementia an average of five years later than those with the lowest levels of mental stimulation.

The Power of "Newness": The study highlighted that the type of learning matters. While repetitive tasks are helpful, learning a new skill—such as a foreign language, a musical instrument, or a complex craft—creates the most significant neural growth.

Never Too Late: Perhaps the most inspirational finding is that the benefits weren't reserved solely for those who were academic in their youth. Increasing mental activity in mid-to-late life still showed a profound protective effect.

What Counts as "Mental Exercise"?

You don't need a PhD to build a resilient brain. The study identified several accessible activities that contribute to this five-year delay:

Social Engagement: Complex social interactions require the brain to process non-verbal cues, language, and emotional responses simultaneously.

Strategic Games: Chess, bridge, and even modern strategic video games challenge the brain's executive function.❑

Chicago cultural institutions unveil groundbreaking accessibility

In a world where live music is often defined by the roar of speakers and the buzz of a crowd, a revolutionary piece of wearable technology is ensuring that the "sound" of an orchestra is no longer exclusive to those who can hear it. The SoundShirt, developed by London-based tech company CuteCircuit, is transforming the concert experience for the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community by turning symphonies into tactile sensations.

How Science Meets Symphony

The SoundShirt is a high-tech garment embedded with 30 micro-actuators (tiny motors) woven directly into the fabric. These sensors are wirelessly connected to a computer system that analyzes the live audio from an orchestra in real-time.

Each instrument is assigned a specific location on the body, creating a "spatial map" of the music:

Deep Bass: Heavily felt in the stomach and lower back.

Violins and Flutes: Light, fluttering sensations along the arms and shoulders.

Percussion: Sharp, rhythmic pulses across the chest.

As the conductor leads the ensemble, the wearer feels the music move across their skin, mimicking the way sound waves physically travel through space.

Breaking the Silence in Chicago

While the technology originated in Europe, it recently made headlines in the United States through a groundbreaking partnership with the Chicago Philharmonic. During their 2024-2025 season, the orchestra became one of the first in the U.S. to offer SoundShirts to audience members.

A Soundshirt and Sound Miniskirt, designed by Francesca Rosella and Ryan Genz, are displayed as part of the Access+Ability exhibit at the Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum February 8, 2018 in New York

For many attendees, it was the first time they could distinguish between a cello's mournful drawl and a trumpet's bright fanfare. Users describe the experience not just as "vibration," but as a nuanced, immersive language that allows them to follow the emotional arc of a masterpiece as clearly as any hearing person.

The Fashion of Inclusivity

Beyond its technical prowess, the SoundShirt is a marvel of sustainable fashion. CuteCircuit designed the shirts using smart fabrics—meaning there are no cumbersome wires or bulky battery packs. The garment is soft, stretchable, and looks like high-end athleisure, ensuring that wearers feel like a seamless part of the audience rather than someone using a medical device.

The shirt's design reflects a broader movement in "inclusive design," where technology is used to bridge the gap between different sensory experiences. By focusing on the haptic (touch-based) nature of sound, the SoundShirt acknowledges that music has always been a physical force—now, that force is simply being translated.❑

Machine convert carbon dioxice into a synthetic drop-in gasoline

In a breakthrough for carbon-neutral transportation, a new generation of "air-to-fuel" machines has emerged, capable of capturing carbon dioxide directly from the atmosphere and converting it into synthetic gasoline that can be used in any standard internal combustion engine. This "drop-in" fuel technology, demonstrated by several companies in 2025 and 2026, offers a potential lifeline for the world's existing automotive fleet without requiring expensive electric vehicle (EV) conversions or new infrastructure.

A gas pump is seen on November 26, 2025 in Austin, Texas.

The "Refrigerator-Sized" Solution

One of the most notable developments occurred in May 2025, when New York-based startup Aircela unveiled a compact, modular machine roughly the size of a refrigerator. This unit integrates direct air capture (DAC) and on-site fuel synthesis, allowing it to produce approximately one gallon of gasoline per day using only air, water, and renewable electricity.

The Aircela system operates through a multi-stage chemical process:

Carbon Capture: A water-based solution containing potassium hydroxide (KOH) captures from ambient air as it flows through a specialized chamber.

Hydrogen Production: An on-site electrolyzer uses renewable energy to split water into hydrogen and oxygen.

Synthesis: The captured and hydrogen are combined to create methanol, which is then refined into gasoline through a two-step catalytic process.

The resulting gasoline contains no sulfur, ethanol, or heavy metals, making it fully compatible with existing engines. Aircela began initial deployments in late 2025, focusing on off-grid, commercial, and industrial users.

Industrial-Scale Breakthroughs

While Aircela targets distributed, local production, other companies are scaling the technology for global markets. HIF Global, in partnership with Porsche, is expanding its "Haru Oni" facility in Chile to produce up to 550 million liters of eFuel annually by 2026. This facility utilizes southern Chile's intense wind energy to power the synthesis of virtually-neutral fuel.

In the United States, Prometheus Fuels achieved a major commercial milestone in July 2025 by reaching Technology Readiness Level 9 (TRL 9)—the highest benchmark for real-world deployment. Their "Titan Forge Alpha" prototype successfully produced carbon-neutral e-fuel using off-grid renewable energy. Prometheus claims its proprietary DAC process costs less than

CO_2$, a price point that could make synthetic fuels competitive with traditional fossil fuels without the need for government subsidies.

A Circular Carbon Cycle

The primary appeal of these machines is their ability to create a "closed-loop" energy system. When traditional gasoline is burned, it releases "old" carbon that was previously stored underground. In contrast, synthetic gasoline returns the same carbon to the atmosphere that was captured to create it. This process can reduce fossil emissions in combustion engines by up to 90%.

Professor Erwin Reiser and Dr. Sayan Kar at the University of Cambridge have also developed a solar-powered "flow reactor" inspired by photosynthesis. This device captures at night and uses sunlight during the day to convert it into syngas, further simplifying the energy requirements for fuel production.

The Road Ahead: Scaling and Challenges

Despite these successes, the synthetic fuel industry remains in its infancy. As of early 2026, total global e-fuel production still accounts for less than 1% of global fossil fuel production. High production costs remain a significant hurdle; for example, early estimates for Porsche's synthetic fuel were as high as £37 per gallon, though costs are expected to drop as production ramps up at new facilities in Texas, Tasmania, and Uruguay.

As mandated markets for sustainable aviation and maritime fuels grow, these "air-to-fuel" machines are expected to play a critical role in decarbonizing sectors where electrification is impractical. For the average driver, this technology represents a future where the classic engine notes of a gasoline car can coexist with a commitment to a carbon-neutral planet.❑

At a wood factory in Petoskey, soberliving comes with a job

In northern Michigan, a family-owned wood manufacturer is proving that a successful business can also be a powerful engine for social change.

Manthei Wood Products, located in Petoskey, is gaining national attention for its pioneering "win-win" approach: hiring individuals directly out of addiction rehab and providing them with both stable employment and supportive housing.

A worker cuts wood in saw-mill in village of Mraclin, some 50 kilometers south of Zagreb, on July 18, 2009.

A Foundation of Stability

For many leaving treatment, the lack of a safe home and a steady paycheck can be a major hurdle. To solve this, the company purchased a former motel in Charlevoix and converted it into Maple Leaf Flats—a 10-unit sober living facility dedicated exclusively to its employees.

The program offers more than just a roof:

On-Site Coaching: A dedicated recovery coach lives on-site to help residents navigate everything from life skills to rebuilding their finances.

Built-In Savings: In a clever move to foster long-term independence, the company puts $100 of each resident's monthly rent into a savings account, which they can later use as a down payment for their own apartment.

Accountability and Support: Residents participate in mandatory group meetings and shared meals, creating a community where they are held accountable without the fear of being fired if they struggle or need more treatment.

Why It's Good for Business

While the mission is rooted in community service, Manthei Group's director of missional development, Abe Manthei, notes that it also solves a critical labor shortage. By tapping into a motivated workforce looking for a second chance, the factory has reduced turnover and maintained its production of wood veneers for everything from high-end guitars to kitchen cabinets.

As one of the first certified "recovery-friendly workplaces" in the state, the factory is serving as a blueprint for others. Michigan is currently investing millions in statewide recovery housing, hoping to replicate this success to support thousands more residents in their journey toward lasting sobriety.❑

Street-side wisdom: The 'Grandma Stand' offering unfiltered

In a bustling New York City intersection where the pace of life usually borders on frantic, a small purple booth has become an unlikely sanctuary of stillness. The Grandma Stand, a mobile pop-up initiative, is redefining urban connection by offering the one thing money can't buy: the undivided, non-judgmental attention of a grandmother.

Demonstrators from Grandmother's Against War, Code Pink and Brooklyn for Peace gather outside NBC studios August 20, 2012 in New York

A Legacy of Love

The project began not as a grand social experiment, but as a grandson's tribute. In 2012, New Yorker Mike Matthews wanted to share the boundless empathy of his 95-year-old grandmother, Eileen Wilkinson. Because Eileen lived in Seattle and could no longer travel, Matthews built a wooden stand, placed a laptop on the counter, and invited strangers on the Upper West Side to video chat with her.

The sign simply read: "Talk to my 95-year-old grandmother."

For six years, Eileen became a digital matriarch to thousands. Passers-by would stop for five minutes and stay for forty, pouring out their hearts about career anxieties, relationship woes, or the simple loneliness of city life. Eileen listened until she passed away in 2018 at the age of 102, but the seeds of the Grandma Stand had already taken root.

The Purple Booth Returns

After a hiatus, Matthews brought the stand back in 2024 with a fresh coat of purple paint—Eileen's favorite color— and a growing roster of volunteer grandmothers. The mission remains the same: providing a "safe harbor" in a world of digital noise.

The stand now features a rotation of 15 to 30 grandmothers who participate either in person or via Zoom from across the country. These women, ranging in age from their 60s to their 90s, offer a type of "unconditional positive regard" that is increasingly rare in the age of social media.

Wisdom Without an Agenda

What draws people to the stand? According to Matthews and the volunteers, it is the lack of an "agenda." In a digital landscape dominated by influencers and curated lives, the Grandma Stand offers a space where there is nothing to sell and no one to impress.

"Grandmothers have a way of looking at you that makes you feel like the only person in the world," Matthews noted in an interview with Next Avenue. To facilitate deeper connections, the stand often displays prompts such as, "What is a lesson you learned the hard way?" or "What are you most proud of?" These questions act as icebreakers, moving the conversation past weather-talk into the realm of shared human experience.

A Global Movement Against Loneliness

The success of the New York stand has sparked a "Grandma-led" revolution. Similar initiatives have sprouted in other cities:

In McKinney, Texas, Nancy McClendon and her team of volunteers set up chairs to dispense "street-side wisdom."

In Chicago and Denver, local organizers have reached out to Matthews to replicate the purple booth model.

The impact is two-fold. While the "grandkids" (as the visitors are called) find comfort, the grandmothers find a renewed sense of purpose. Research consistently shows that intergenerational connection reduces cognitive decline in seniors and provides a vital sense of community belonging. As Eileen once told her grandson, the stand extended her life by making her feel relevant and needed.

The Future of Connection

As the Grandma Stand continues its residency in neighborhoods like Tribeca and the Upper West Side, it serves as a powerful reminder that the solution to modern isolation might just be an old-fashioned conversation.

In a world of high-tech solutions, the most effective tool for mental well-being might be an 80-pound wooden booth, a comfortable chair, and a woman who has seen enough of life to know that, eventually, everything is going to be okay.❑

The Last Domino Falls: Women now hold the legal right to vote

In a historic turning point for global equality, the final domino has officially fallen. Following a landmark 2023 policy shift within Vatican City, women now hold the legal right to vote in every country and sovereign territory on Earth.

The Empire State Building and the World Trade Center sit behind the Statue of Liberty in New York City, lit in purple and gold as part of the "Forward Into Light" initiative to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment and women's constitutional right to vote, as seen from Bayonne, New Jersey, on August 26, 2020.

The Final Frontier

For decades, the tiny city-state of Vatican City remained the only place in the world where women were legally barred from participating in the selection of leadership. Because the territory is an absolute monarchy led by the Pope, "voting" occurs primarily during the Synod of Bishops and the Conclave. Historically, these ballots were reserved exclusively for men.

However, in April 2023, Pope Francis issued a transformative decree. He announced that women and laypeople would not only be allowed to attend the upcoming Synod on Synodality but would also be granted full voting rights on church governance and future direction.

A Century of Progress

This milestone marks the conclusion of a journey that began over a century ago. From the suffragette movements of the early 1900s in New Zealand and the United States to the 2015 municipal elections in Saudi Arabia, the fight for the ballot has been one of the most consistent human rights struggles in history.

While the Vatican's structure remains unique (as the Pope is still elected solely by the College of Cardinals), the inclusion of women's votes in the Synod represents a fundamental shift in the legal recognition of female agency in the world's last holdout.

Symbolic and Practical Impact

The change is more than just symbolic. By ensuring women have a seat—and a vote—at the table, the Vatican is acknowledging the vital role women play in the global community. Organizations like the World Economic Forum note that political participation is a key metric in closing the gender gap, and this move effectively clears the global map of legal barriers to female suffrage.

The Work Ahead

While the legal right to vote is now universal, advocates emphasize.❑

Scottish fashion seeks new talent for homespun crafts

Ayr United Kingdom
Far from the glamour of fashion weeks in Paris, Milan and London, a nondescript cashmere mill on Scotland's western coast that supplies luxury labels hopes local training programmes can attract new talent.
"It's a dying trade," 61-year-old Maria Wade said of her job as a "greasy mender" at Alex Begg, a semi-rural mill that has been based in Ayr in southwest Scotland for more than a century.

The weaving mill supplies cashmere to prestigious fashion brands, which cannot be named for confidentiality reasons, as well as its own luxury label, Begg x Co. "You don't get many people mending raw cashmere," said Wade, whose role is to meticulously inspect and darn any defects in the fabric by hand, before it is washed, cut and shipped around the world.
Famed for its luxury tweeds, wools and cashmeres, Scotland's textile industry has seen a sharp decline in recent decades as high manufacturing costs struggle to compete with cheap production abroad, and an ageing workforce retires, taking traditional manufacturing skills with them.

Greasy Mender Maria Wade works with cashmere at the Alex Begg mill in Ayr, south west Scotland, on January 15, 2026.

When technical transformation director Lorna Dempsey joined Alex Begg more than 25 years ago, the average age was "quite old", she told AFP, "about 50-plus".
Since then, the company has made a "conscious effort to try and recruit younger people" and brought the average age down to around 40.
It's no easy task in the run-down former mining town, with those interested in fashion careers looking to places such as Glasgow, around an hour's drive away, or even further afield.
"We don't have a lot of skills within the Ayrshire area, so it's very difficult for us to try and find skilled staff," said Dempsey.
The rise of fast fashion has made it harder to find young people with manufacturing know-how.
"A lot of our operations are definitely a skill from the past," said Dempsey, adding that people don't learn how to "darn their socks anymore."

- 'On my doorstep' -
The mill's partnership with the King's Foundation a charity founded by King Charles III and headquartered in the nearby Dumfries House estate has helped turn things around.
The foundation runs programmes aimed at addressing "a skills gap within the UK textile industry".
Trainees learn about production lines, supply chains, working with different materials and sustainable design skills that employers say are often not covered in fashion school.
They are then given work experience at Scottish mills such as Alex Begg, and some like Emma Hyslop manage to secure a job.
Sat behind a fringing machine at the mill, Hyslop, 28, deftly ran a dark cashmere fabric destined for a Spanish luxury brand through its frame, twisting the ends of the cloth into fringes.
After getting a fashion design diploma at a Glasgow college, Hyslop did a six-week course with the King's Foundation, through which she discovered the luxury mill in her backyard.❑

Noisy humans harm birds and affect breeding success: study

Paris, France
Noise pollution is affecting bird behaviour across the globe, disrupting everything from courtship songs to the ability to find food and avoid predators, a large-scale new analysis showed on Wednesday.
Researchers reviewed nearly four decades of scientific work and found that noises made by humans were interfering with the lives of birds on six continents and having "strong negative effects" on reproduction success.
Previous research on individual species has shown that single sources of anthropogenic noise such as planes, traffic and construction can affect birds as it does other wildlife.
But for this study, the team performed a wider analysis by pooling data published since 1990 across 160 bird species to see if any broader trends could be established.
The study, published in the journal Proceedings of the Royal Society B, found clear evidence of a "pervasive" impact of noise pollution on birds worldwide.

"We found that noise significantly impacts communication risk behaviours, foraging, aggression and physiology and had a strong effect on habitat use and a negative impact on reproduction," it said.
This is because birds rely on acoustic information to survive, making them particularly vulnerable to the modern din produced by cars, machinery and urban life.
"They use song to find mates, calls to warn of predators, and chicks make begging calls to let their parents know they're hungry," Natalie Madden, who led the research while at the University of Michigan, said in a statement.
"So if there's loud noise in the environment, can they still hear signals from their own species?"
In some cases, noise pollution interrupted mating displays, caused males to change their courtship songs, or masked messages between chicks and parents.
The study included many common species such as European robins and starlings, house sparrows, and great tits.

- Solutions exist -
The response varied between species, with birds that nest close to the ground suffering greater reproductive harm, while those using open nests experienced stronger effects on growth.
Birds living in urban areas, meanwhile, tended to have higher levels of stress hormones than those outside of cities.
Some 61 percent of the world's bird species have declining populations, mostly due to habitat loss driven by expanding agriculture and logging, the International Union for Conservation of Nature said in October. The study authors said that noise pollution was an "underappreciated consequence" of humanity's impact on nature, especially compared to biodiversity loss and climate change.❑

A pair of Formosan blue magpies sit in a nest during the breeding season at the Toucheng Leisure Farm in Ilan county, northeastern Taiwan, on May 6, 2020.

The Japanese snowball fight game vying to be an Olympic sport

Sobetsu, Japan

At the foot of an active volcano in northern Japan, shouts ring out, competitors size each other up and snowballs whistle through the air in a very serious game of "yukigassen" a sport with Olympic dreams.

The competition taking place this weekend is held every year in Sobetsu, a town on the main northern island of Hokkaido, where this game essentially a snowball fight became a sport 37 years ago.

On the field, brute strength isn't enough. Japan's yukigassen federation emphasises the "mental challenge" posed by the game, in which players on both teams pelt their opponents while taking cover behind shelters.

The goal: hit all seven players on the opposing team using perfectly spherical snowballs made with a special machine, or capture their flag.

"When you get hit, it hurts, but it's mostly your pride that takes the blow," said Toshihiro Takahashi, a 48-year-old civil servant dripping with sweat after his match.

Players throw snowballs during the Showa-shinzan International Yukigassen snowball fight competition in Sobetsu, Hokkaido prefecture on February 21, 2026.

The idea of turning yukigassen into a sport was born out of a crisis in Sobetsu.

While visitors once flocked to the town to enjoy its hot springs, the eruption of Mount Usu in 1977 brought tourism in the area to an abrupt halt.

Residents, looking for ways to put their town back on the map, had a flash of inspiration when they saw a group of tourists having fun during a snowball fight and thought: what if this children's game could save the town?

"It's a primitive sport, almost instinctive for human beings," Yuji Ano, president of the tournament's organising committee, told AFP.

"Our ancestors were surely doing the same thing. It's the oldest winter sport in human history: long before skating or skiing, humans were already throwing snowballs at each other. That's its biggest appeal."

All that remained was to put rules down on paper, develop special helmets and invent a machine to mould the snowballs.

Yukigassen which means snowball fight in Japanese was born, and the first international tournament took place in 1989.

- From snow to beach -

The sport spread to Australia three years later, then to Finland, which set up a national federation in 1995.

After that it caught on elsewhere in Scandinavia, as well as in Russia and North America, and is now played in 13 countries, according to Ano.

Keen to capitalise on the international expansion, officials want to turn yukigassen into an Olympic sport.

Ano noted that there are very few team sports at this year's Milan-Cortina Winter Olympics, which are wrapping up on Sunday.

This year, more than a thousand players came to compete in Sobetsu, but not a single foreign team is among the 118 entrants.

Atasu, a 55-year-old who has been playing yukigassen for over thirty years and chose to give only his nickname, admitted it had become very challenging to recruit players.❑

St Francis relics go on public show for first time in Italy

Assisi, Italy

Saint Francis of Assisi's skeleton is going on public display from Sunday for the first time for the 800th anniversary of his death, drawing hundreds of thousands of visitors.

Inside a nitrogen-filled plexiglass case with the Latin inscription "Corpus Sancti Francisci" (The Body of St Francis), the remains are being shown in the Italian hill town's Basilica of St Francis of Assisi.

St Francis, who died on October 3, 1226, founded the Franciscan order after renouncing his wealth and devoting his life to the poor.

Giulio Cesareo, director of communications for the Franciscan convent in Assisi said he hoped the display could be "a meaningful experience" for believers and non-believers alike.

This video grab taken from an AFP shooting shows the remains of St. Francis of Assisi on display in a glass case inside the Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi during a press preview, in Assisi on February 21, 2026.

Cesareo, a Franciscan friar, said the "damaged" and "consumed" state of the bones showed that St Francis "gave himself completely" to his life's work.

His remains, which will be on display until March 22, were transferred to the basilica built in the saint's honour in 1230.

But it was only in 1818, after excavations carried out in utmost secrecy, that his tomb was rediscovered.

Apart from previous exhumations for inspection and scientific examination, the bones of Saint Francis have only been displayed once, in 1978, to a very limited public and for just one day.

Usually hidden from view, the transparent case containing the relics since 1978 was brought out on Saturday from the metal coffer in which it is kept, inside his stone tomb in the crypt of the basilica.

The case is itself inside another bullet-proof and anti-burglary glass case.

Surveillance cameras will operate 24 hours a day for added protection of the remains.

St Francis is Italy's patron saint and the 800th anniversary commemorations of his death will also see the restoration of an October 4 public holiday in his honour.

The holiday had been scrapped nearly 50 years ago for budget reasons.

Its revival is also a tribute to late pope Francis who took on the saint's name.

Pope Francis died last year at the age of 88.

– 'Not a movie set' –

Reservations to see the saint's remains already amount to "almost 400,000 (people) coming from all parts of the world, with of course a clear predominance from Italy," said Marco Moroni, guardian of the Franciscan convent.

"But we also have Brazilians, North Americans, Africans," he added.

During this rather quiet time of year, the basilica usually sees 1,000 visitors per day on weekdays, rising to 4,000 on weekends.

The Franciscans said they were expecting 15,000 visitors per day on weekdays and up to 19,000 on Saturdays and Sundays for the month-long display of the remains.

"From the very beginning, since the time of the catacombs, Christians have venerated the bones of martyrs, the relics of martyrs, and they have never really experienced it as something macabre," Cesareo said.❑

Snakes of Aruba

Arikok National Park is home to various unique plant and animal species such as Aruba's rare endemic rattlesnake Crotalus unicolor). This rattlesnake is locally known as the 'Cascabel'. But Aruba has two more snake species living on the island: the Santanero and the Boa.

Cascabel (Crotalus unicolor)

The small Cascabel or Aruba Island Rattlesnake averages 70 cm in length. The body color is often uniform gray or light brown. There may be a faint pattern of diamond shaped markings on the back. This pattern is most noticeable on younger snakes. The most distinctive feature of this snake is the rattle at the end of its tail which makes a buzzing sound when the snake is alarmed. Cascabels are shy and not aggressive, but their venom can be dangerous to humans. It is best to leave this snake alone. Do not attempt to catch or kill it.

Cascabels hunt by waiting under bushes and fruiting trees to catch passing lizards, mice, rats, small rabbits, and an occasional bird. This is often considered to be one of the rarest rattlesnakes in the world. The range of the Cascabel is restricted to the rugged and mountainous areas of the island mostly within Arikok National Park. The Arikok National Park was designated in the early 1980s to include most of the rattlesnake's population, providing a safe refuge in which the snake can be protected and monitored. The government has also implemented outreach and education initiatives to change local perception of the snake and highlight its ecological and economic importance – it is now being promoted as a national symbol.

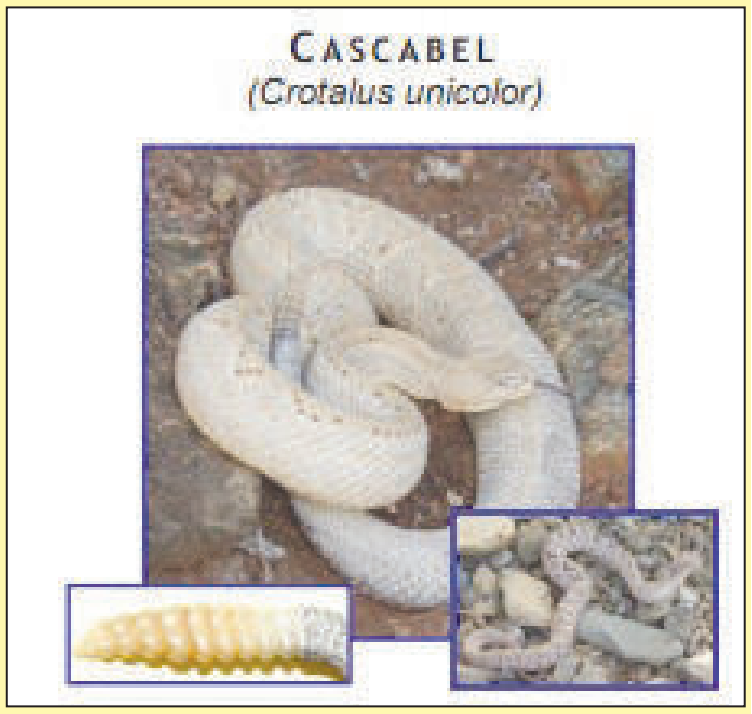
Arikok's partnership with the Toledo zoo has safeguarded the rattlesnake ex-situ and led to a number of research projects collecting critical data on the Cascabel's abundance, life history and habitat requirement to help guide future conservation efforts.

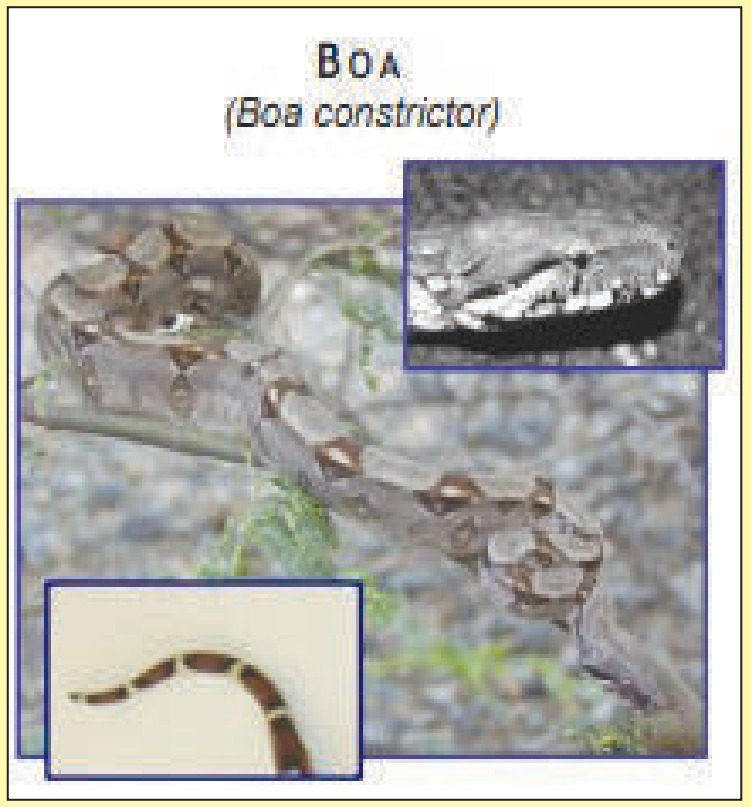
Santanero

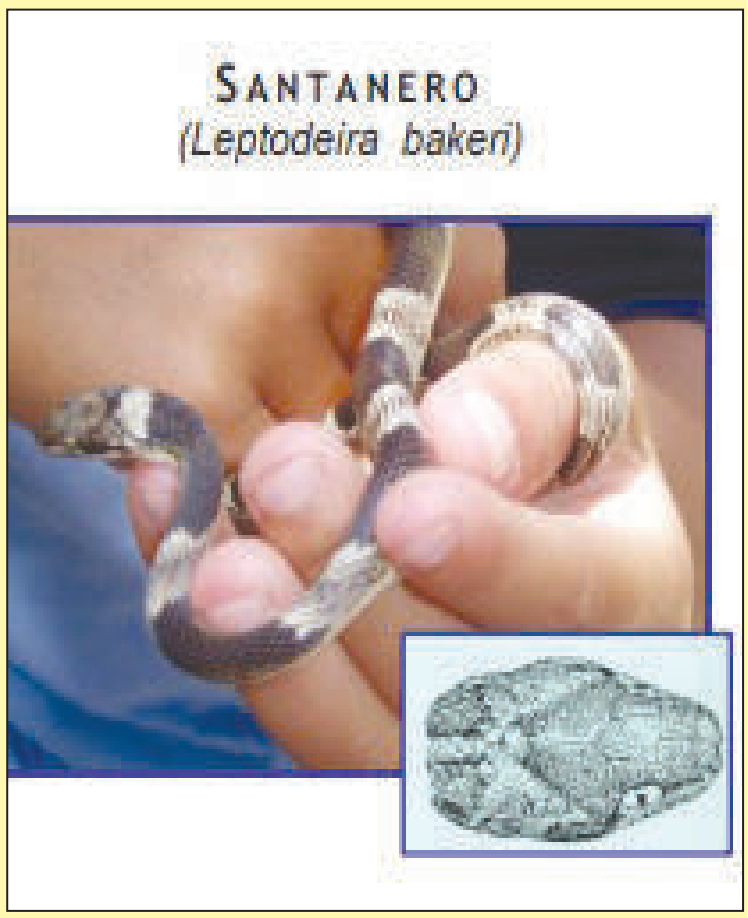
The slender Santanero or Aruban Cat-eyed Snake is typically less than 50 cm long. This snake is recognizable by the large scales on the top of its head and by its pattern of dark brown bands alternating with light brown bands. The belly is plain white or cream colored without any markings. This snake is shy and not aggressive. However, it has enlarged teeth at the back of its mouth and mild venom which is not dangerous to humans. However, the venom can paralyze small lizards and frogs. Santaneros are most active at night when they search for food. During the day, they hide under rocks or leaves. They frequently climb trees and cactus. Santaneros eat toads, frogs, insects, and lizards. You may find Santaneros near dams during periods of rainy weather or crossing roads at night. This snake is found island wide. A Santanero in your garden will keep away the unwanted insects. If you encounter a Santanero around your garden, please do not harm this species.

Boa (Boa constrictor)

Boas are Aruba's largest snakes. The longest Boa found on the island was slightly less than 3 m. Newborn Boas average 35 cm. Boas are not venomous. The most distinctive feature of a Boa is its pattern of dark brown and tan blotches which become red toward the tail. The belly in white or cream colored with numerous black spots. Boas are excellent climbers and may be found in trees and cactus. Boas also hide in the leaves under bushes waiting to catch prey that pass. Boas catch their prey with their teeth and then constrict it in their coils. The Boa's diet consists of birds, lizards, rats, mice, and rabbits. Large Boas have been known to eat small goats and chickens. When threatened, Boas will hiss loudly. Boas are a non-native species. The first Boas were reported on the island in 1999. Since that time they have been found across the entire island in all types of habitats.







Po-Ké Ono Brings Bold Asian Fusion to Aruba's Dining Scene

Innovative eatery blends island culture with modern Asian cuisine

Oranjestad, Aruba – In a culinary landscape known for its diversity and creativity, Po-Ké Ono stands out as a vibrant and contemporary addition to Aruba's restaurant scene. With locations at Azure in Palm Beach and the Renaissance Marketplace in Oranjestad, the concept introduces a refreshing take on Asian fusion dining—casual in style, yet refined in execution.

Established in 2020, Po-Ké Ono was envisioned as a space where flavor, culture, and creativity intersect. The menu features

an array of signature dishes including poke bowls, steamed bao, and sushi, crafted with precision and a focus on freshness. Drawing on Asian influences, the restaurant delivers bold flavors in an approachable format, appealing to a broad audience of locals and visitors alike.

The ambiance is designed to be welcoming and relaxed, with a philosophy centered around accessibility and enjoyment. Whether dining indoors or grabbing a quick bowl on the go, guests can expect a consistently high standard in both service and cuisine. With extensive menu options, including selections for vegan diners, Po-Ké Ono caters to a wide range of tastes and dietary preferences.

While the concept leans into fast-casual dining, the quality of ingredients and thoughtful preparation reflect fine-dining roots. Many of the restaurant's core ingredients are sourced locally, emphasizing sustainability and support for Aruba's agricultural community. The result is a dining experience that honors both the island's spirit and the culinary traditions it draws inspiration from.

Open daily from 11:00 AM to 10:00 PM, Po-Ké Ono continues to gain recognition as one of the island's premier destinations for sushi, poke, and bao. Its growing popularity is a testament to Aruba's evolving food culture—one that embraces global influence while staying rooted in community and craft.

For those seeking a modern taste of Asia in the heart of the Caribbean, Po-Ké Ono offers a flavorful and memorable experience worth exploring.

Kevin and Margaret Burke honored as loyal visitors at Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort!

The Aruba Tourism Authority recently had the great pleasure of recognizing Goodwill Ambassadors of Aruba. The honorees were respectively honored with a certificate for their years of visits, loyalty, and love for the island of Aruba.

The honorary certification is presented on behalf of the Minister of Tourism as a token of appreciation and to say "Masha Danki" to guests who have visited Aruba 10, 20, or 35 years or more consecutively.

The three levels of honor are as follows:
Distinguished Visitor (10>years consecutively visiting Aruba)
Goodwill Ambassador (20>years consecutively visiting Aruba)
Emerald Ambassador (35>years consecutively visiting Aruba)

The honorees were:

Goodwill Ambassadors
Mr. Kevin and Mrs. Margaret Burke from

Guilford, Connecticut, United States.

The top reasons for returning to Aruba provided by the honorees were:

- Aruba's beautiful weather.
- Aruba is a very safe island.
- Aruba's friendly people.
- Aruba's beautiful beaches.
- "We love the Bucuti & Tara"

On behalf of the Aruba Tourism Authority, we would like to express our sincere gratitude and appreciation to the honorees for their continued visits to the "One Happy Island".

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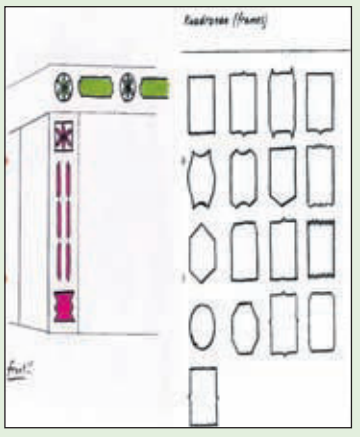
Cas Floria: The Decorated Houses of Aruba

(Oranjestad)—There may be as many as 200 to 300 houses in Aruba that have beautiful decorations, including curtains, stars, flowers, half-moons, etc., placed on the corners or the upper parts of the house.



These houses can be found everywhere, in nearly every district of Aruba. People always thought that these designs came from an Indigenous culture; possibly, the star design resembled the way it was shown, similar to the "God Sun" of the Indigenous people. However, the history of this decorative system does not go very far back in time.

In his book Millefiori di Aruba, Father Nooyen declares that the first house to receive this type of decoration was the home of Mr. Bernardo Eman Croes in Pos Chikito. Julien (Janchi) Christiaans and Gregorio (Goy) Semeleer built this house in 1920 and created the decorations on the upper corners of the house. Other people in Pos Chikito, who saw this beautiful work, also wanted their houses decorated in the same way.

Leoncio (Joonchi) Henricus of Pos Chikito learned the work from Janchi Christiaans and, together with his son Bonifacio (Bonny) Henricus, continued decorating houses in Pos Chikito and Sabana Basora.

Janchi Christiaans, Goy Semeleer, and others from Noord, such as Hilario Christiaans, Victor Tromp, Gerardo Jacobs, and Comelis Rosa, brought the same decoration to houses in Noord and Paradera. In 1927, Janchi Christiaans built a house for Julian Tromp in Buguruy.

This was the first house in Noord to receive this type of decoration. Later, those in Paradera, Santa Cruz, and Savaneta copied the house decorations. They practiced these systems up until 1944.

Even today, the patterns are well preserved and protected, but they are no longer used.

Janchi Christiaans began cutting the patterns out of zinc plates and cardboard. He also had his own creations and systems, while Leoncio and Bonifacio Henricus produced their own fantasies. This is what made these decorations popular: many people could turn their imagination into expressive art.

However, the decoration of houses was not originally Janchi Christiaans's idea. Janchi was a disciple of his father, Hose Christiaans, and of the Donati family, from Italian ancestors. They also made these decorations, though without using any patterns, simply designing and applying them with common plaster as the material.

Using Dr. Johan Hartog's Aruba, Breve Historia as reference, I noticed that he also writes that these designs are not indigenous symbols, but only decorative fantasies. One point of disagreement is that he wrote that in 1820 someone from Curaçao began this type of decoration in Aruba.

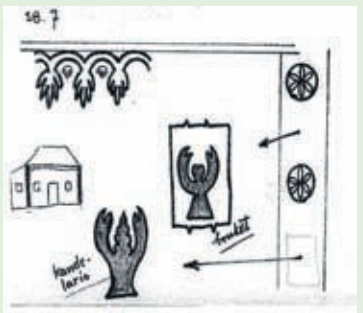
This means that, according to Father Nooyen, who declared that it began in 1920, it would have actually started 100 years earlier. As part of his research, Ito Tromp also interviewed Mr. Julio Maduro of the Department of Labor at that time, who told him that around 1880 Johannes (Janchi) Wolff began with house decorations. And as Janchi himself said, he learned this from his grandfather, who in earlier times had built the first lighthouse at California Point.

After comparing his information, Ito Tromp wrote that Hartog was right concerning the period when decorated houses began in Aruba in 1820. However, it was not people from Curaçao who started it. Victor Tromp, who was 87 years old at the time of writing, was a member of Janchi Wolff's family.

Julio Maduro said that in 1920 they began again with this type of decoration. In general, there is no specific year (up to now) when Arubans first began with this decorative artistic expression. It is interesting to know that these decorations are a kind of symbol for several generations.

For example: Decorations that appear on the house of the Arends family could also be seen on the houses of the Bermudez or Croes families. This was because parents always gave a specific sign to their sons or daughters when they were getting married.

It was also said that these designs had a certain kind of voodoo purpose, to keep away the spirits of the Indigenous people who were buried in the neighborhoods where the houses now stand. However, this has almost completely disappeared.



As for the continuation of these designs from family to family, this is a cultural heritage that is no longer established. For this reason, in earlier times, every young man who married had to have his own house; otherwise, there would be no marriage.

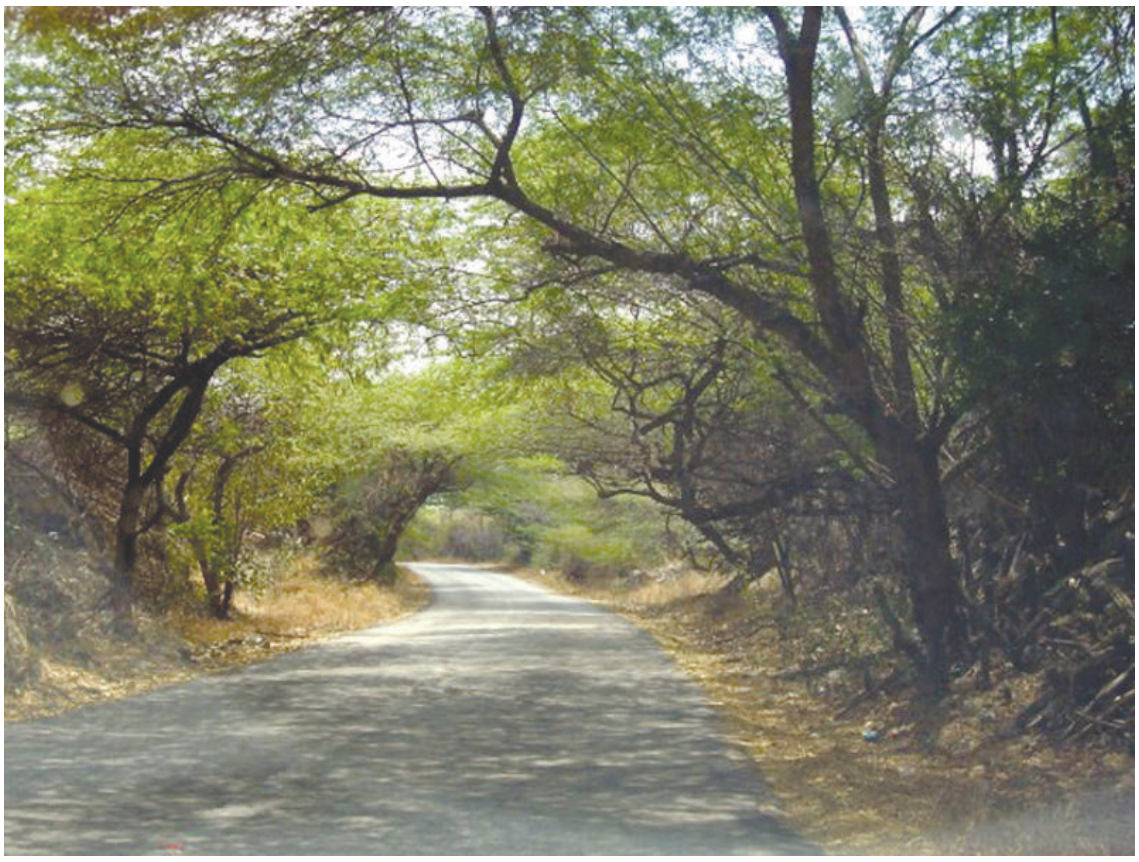
The designs were created according to the individual's imagination. If he saw, for example, six pairs of birds on a tree, he would then paint six pairs of birds on a tree. If he wanted to express his love for his twin children, then he designed a twin.

Nowadays, if you want to use these designs for your house, don't worry—you can simply copy them and paint them.

Source: E casnan Decora na Aruba (1976) by Ito Tromp.

Aruban legends: Frenchman's Pass

(Oranjestad)—If you ever plan on taking a group tour of the island, you may pass through the Frenchman's Pass in Balashi. The Frenchman's pass (known to locals as "Franse Pas") remains a mysterious and spooky road of which its legend is told from generation to generation.



The history of the Frenchman's pass and how it got its name dates back to the colonization era, when the French tried to colonize the island, but were met with an angry mob of indigenous settlers, refusing to give up their land. However, as the French were heavily equipped with fire arms, the indigenous settlers began to retreat, and hid away in nearby caves. The French colonizers tried to smoke them out of the caves, but the indigenous settlers ended up inhaling too much smoke and most died in those caves. From then on, this passage was known as Frenchman's Pass, and there have been many accounts of spirits roaming the area of Spanish Lagoon.

There are many ghost stories surrounding this area, but one of the most famous one involves a lonely hitchhiker, trying to find a ride back home in the dark rainy night.

Sometime after trying to hitch a ride home, the man saw a car approaching, appearing almost ghost-like in the rain. However, since he needed a ride real bad, he didn't think twice and jumped in. But to his horror, he noticed that the there was no driver in the front. Paralyzed with fear, he didn't dare to get out, and the car started to move.

When approaching a sharp turn, the hitch hiker braced for impact, but just when he though the car might drive straight off the road and crash, he saw a hand appear out the window and turn the wheel. For the next few turns, the hand appeared again. After having had enough, the man decided to jump out and he ran to Santa Cruz.

Arriving at a nearby bar, he ordered a drink and began to tell everyone about his experience. Everyone grew quiet, because they realized he wasn't some drunk messing around; he was telling the truth.

Sometime later, two men walked into the bar and one of them noticed the hitchhiker. He called out to his buddy and said: "Look, there's the idiot who sat in our car when we were pushing it!"

French man's pass is one of the few sites on the island that keeps the locals on their toes. While most ghost stories may not have real grounds—or some may even be a set up story for a joke, this pass holds a lot of value to our culture of folkloric story-telling.

Source: visitaruba.com

Conchi: Aruba's hidden natural pool

(Oranjestad)—Amongst the countless beaches surrounding the island that are well-known and frequently visited, there is an additional "hidden" natural pools that is situated in the northern coast of the island, two ideal stops in your tour itinerary. This is Conchi.

Conchi (Natural Pool)

For many years, Conchi was the only natural pool that we had on the island. Located in the Arikok National Park, near Boca Keto and the Daimari Ranch, Conchi also known "Cura di Turtuga (Turtle's Cove) or just Natural Pool is reachable with any 4×4 vehicle or by foot if you're up for a long hike. However, since it is part of the National Park, you must first get permission from park management to enter. You would have to purchase a day pass, and receive a wristband as proof of payment. Once you've completed that, you are set!

If you decide to hike from the entrance of the Arikok National Park, this is also possible: do bring plenty of protective clothing and enough water and food it could take you up to three hours to hike there!

However, when you eventually do get there, you will be greeted with crystal blue water surrounded by a natural rock formation that protects you from the wild waves on the other side. Though the pool is located on the northern side of the island (where the sea is largely rough and largely no suitable for swimming), the pool itself is very calm. It's also relatively deep, and you can climb up the rocks and jump in!

Fun fact: "Conchi" means small bowl in Papiamento. Once you get there, you may see why we call it that.

Fruit Loose & Veggie Boost

Aruban fruits and vegetables

Fresh fruits make a tropical holiday's picture complete. Whether you see the mango's hanging in the trees or the fresh fruit cocktail on the side table of your poolbed, the link is there: you are in the tropics. Aruba grows her own fruits and veggies and there are some pretty out-of-space local species you may never had heard of, but really healthy and delicious.

Mispel
This is a fruit with a character (5-10 cm/2-4 inches). It does not ripe until it is picked or falls off the tree. Mispel is hard with a sandpaper like texture when immature, soft and juicy when ripe. It's technically a berry, but contains a skin similar to that of a kiwi. It's grainy and sweet, with a light, musky flavor. The sap or gum from the tree is also a source of 'chicle' the original ingredient used to make chewing gum. Rich in tannins, antioxidants shown to contain anti-inflammatory compounds, and vitamin C, essential for healthy immune function. Season: year-round.

Kenepa
Ovoid green fruit that grows in bunches on trees up to 30m high. The fruit is related to the lychee and have tight, thin but rigid skins. Inside the skin is the tart, tangy, or sweet pulp of the fruit covering a large seed. The pulp is usually cream or orange colored. Kenepa strengthens the immune system, and prevents the reproduction of bacteria and viruses in the body. This fruit is highly recommended to treat lung infections and urinary tract infections. It also helps to cure insomnia and rejuvenates the nervous system. Season: the fruit typically ripen during the summer.

Druif
There is no chance you did not bump into one of the sea grape trees while spending your vacation on Aruba. The sea grape plant is often used in ocean-side landscaping in sandy soil right on the beach and it produces clusters of fruit that resemble grapes. Are sea grapes edible? Yes, they are. Animals enjoy sea grapes and humans can eat them as well, and they are used to make jam. They contain very low calories and sugar, enabling good bacterium to digest food and excrete waste quickly which is effective in preventing constipation. Season: Sep-Oct.

Shimarucu
Maybe Aruba's most popular wild fruit tree. You may have noticed cars at the side of the road and people picking those red berries. Well, that's Shimarucu. The local habit to stop for these delicious fruits goes from generation to generation. Its fruit's degree of sour depends on the amount of rain it gets. Red Shimarucus tend to taste better than orange. The fruit has super power: a true vitamin bomb. Adults only need to eat 3-4 of these berries to meet their daily recommended amount of Vitamin C. Season: Rainy months (Oct-Jan).

Tamarind
A delicious, sweet fruit that has a wide variety of uses and applications, both for medicinal and culinary purposes. It is a medium-sized bushy tree with evergreen leaves and fruit that develops in pods characterized by long, brown shells. Inside is a sticky, fleshy, juicy pulp, which is the Tamarind fruit. Both sweet and sour in taste, the fruit contains a significant level of vitamin C, as well as vitamin E, B vitamins, calcium, iron, phosphorous, potassium, manganese, and dietary fiber. There are also a number of organic compounds that make tamarind a powerful antioxidant and anti-inflammatory agent. Season: March.
When it comes to veggies the island certainly offers a home-grown selection. They taste delicious and have their specific talents to boost your immune system.

Concomber chiquito
This is a sort of local squash, but looks like a cucumber with prickly skin. The taste however is bitterer than the cucumber and the vegetable is smaller in size but bigger in width. Inside is a soft, fleshy pulp and seeds, just like the cucumber. Concomber chiquito is grown in the island and used in salads and 'stoba' (stew) or on its own in vinegar. The veggie contains multiple B vitamins, including vitamin B1, vitamin B5, and vitamin B7 (biotin). B vitamins are known to help ease feelings of anxiety and buffer some of the damaging effects of stress. Additionally this veggie is rich in two of the most basic elements needed for healthy digestion: water and fiber. Season: year-round.

Yambo
Family of Okra, also known as 'lady's fingers': a green flowering plant. Okra belongs to the same plant family as hibiscus and cotton. A classic favorite dish in Aruba is Sopi di yambo. It has long been favored as a food for the health-conscious. It contains potassium, vitamin B, vitamin C, folic acid, and calcium. It's low in calories and has a high dietary fiber content. Recently, a new benefit of including okra in your diet is being considered. Okra has been suggested to help manage blood sugar in cases of type 1, type 2, and gestational diabetes. Season: year-round.

Bonch'i Cunucu
A long, small bean, boiled for a side dish or snack. Long beans have a chewy, crunchy texture–more so than snap beans–and a flavor reminiscent of the dry navy bean or asparagus. Besides stir-fry, soups and salads, the long bean is a good choice for stewing, braising (to remain chewy and firm), sautéing, shallow frying, and deep frying.

With cooking, the long bean's bean flavor intensifies. Long beans are low in calories, about 45 calories per cup, and rich in vitamin A and also contain vitamin C and potassium. Season: year-round.

Pampuna
In the endless summer of Caribbean living we only have to concern ourselves with a wet season and a dry season. Still we do indulge heavily in the pleasures of pumpkin and enjoy Caribbean pumpkin recipes year round.

A popular dish in Aruba is Sopi di Pompuna, don't miss it. This dish is made of pumpkin soup, and parsley. Pumpkins are rich in flavonoid polyphenolic antioxidants such as xanthin, lutein and carotenes and also contain vitamins. Pumpkin seeds are a good source of omega-3 fatty acids, vitamins, minerals and proteins. Pumpkins are used to make desserts, breads and soups.❑

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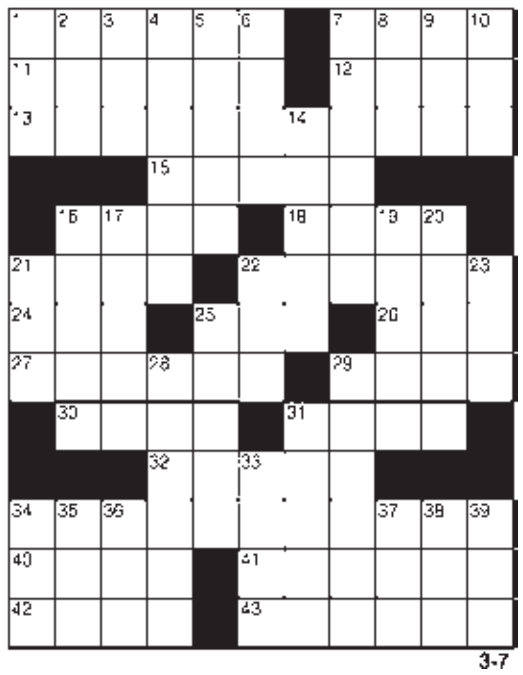
By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Nautical unit
7 Marsh hopper
11 Large lizard
12 See 8-Down
13 Like some roofs and claws
15 Berth places
16 God with a hammer
18 Sanction
21 Serengeti cat
22 Oil field strike
24 Hockey's Bobby
25 Collection
26 Water, in France
27 Course unit
29 Audition goal
30 Glade grazer
31 Tops
32 Labor leader Chavez
34 Difficult to manage
40 Ascend
41 Reach
42 Petty fight
43 Not optional

2 Long time
3 Chiding sound
4 Talk incessantly about
5 Studio sign
6 Spiked club
7 Whiskey holders
8 With 12-Across, Brat Pack actor
9 Athena's symbol
10 "My word!"
14 River catch
16 Ready for bed
17 Neigh sayer
19 In the lead
20 Decade divisions
21 "Very funny!" online
22 Gimlet base
23 Wheel track
25 Asian peninsula
28 Hush-hush
29 Free-booter
31 Barista's creation
33 Do a checkout chore
34 Taxing org.
35 Tiny taste
36 Screening org.
37 Misbehaving
38 Tell tales
39 Finish



DOWN

1 Fragrant tree

3-7

A X Y D L B A A X R
is L O N G F E L L O W

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

3-7 **CRYPTOQUOTE**

L I X Q T G Q B W X B H D F G K L X G

K W L B N X X Q P K E K R K Y D L K B M

H G B J C X W L G B V K M O K L W X R H .

— D R A X G L P D J T W

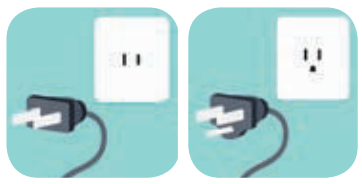
Cryptoquote: LET ME LIVE, LOVE, AND SAY IT WELL IN GOOD SENTENCES. — SYLVIA PLATH

Cruise ship Schedule: Feb. 17 - 24 2026

			ARR	DEPT	BERTH	
TUE	17	CARNIVAL HORIZON	08.00	22.00	B	1
		NORWEGIAN SKY	13.30	22.30	C	1
WED	18	SERENADE OF THE SEAS	08.00	23.00	C	1
		FREEWINDS	06.00	****	E	1
THU	19	AIDABLU	08.00	18.00	B	1
		MSC DIVINA	08.00	18.00	C	1
FRI	20	NORWEGIAN STAR	11.00	20.00	C	1
SUN	22	ISLAND PRINCESS	08.00	17.00	B	1
		EXPLORA I	08.00	18.00	C	1
MON	23	MARELLA DISCOVERY 2	08.00	20.00	C	1
		FREEWINDS - Dept.	****	22.30	E	-
TUE	24	OCEANIA INSIGNIA	08.00	17.00	B	1
		NORWEGIAN SKY	13.30	22.30	C	1
		OASIS OF THE SEAS	08.00	23.00	I	1

Helpful tips for your stay on Aruba

(Oranjestad)—When traveling to another country, especially for the first time, it is always better to be over-prepared than under-prepared. That is why we have a list of basic but important information that we think may come in handy to Aruba's visitors.



Electrical power

Aruba generally operates on 110V to 127V supply voltage and 60Hz. There are also three types of outlets used on the island: type A with two flat prongs; type B with two flat and one grounding prong, and on occasion, type F with two round prong and two earth clips on the side. However, Type A is most commonly found in homes and establishments.

Drinking water

The water that flows through the sinks of every house, hotels and other establishments is distilled and perfectly safe to drink. Aruba's drinking water exceeds WHO's international standards for water quality, so there is no need to buy bottled water from the store.

Safety

Since February 2024, Aruba has been categorized as the safest country in the Caribbean by The Telegraph, and many tourist that visit have often told us how they feel safe to explore the island or walk around at night. However, rare incidents do occurs, so keep yourself and your belongings safe.

SUDOKU

To play sudoku, use logic to fill the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the numbers 1-9 only once. Puzzle difficulty increases from Monday to Sunday.

King Classic Sudoku

8	4	7		5	2	3	1	
		1	3			4	7	
		6				2		8
4	1		6	3				2
		3					6	
6	7		2		9	5		
7	5		1		3	6		4
		4				1		7
1				8				5

Difficulty: ★★ 2/24

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Answer to previous puzzle

4	8	1	7	3	9	6	2	5
9	5	6	1	2	8	3	7	4
7	2	3	6	4	5	9	1	8
6	4	8	3	7	2	5	9	1
5	1	2	8	9	6	4	3	7
3	7	9	4	5	1	8	6	2
2	6	5	9	1	4	7	8	3
8	3	4	2	6	7	1	5	9
1	9	7	5	8	3	2	4	6

Difficulty: ★ 2/23

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A father and his kid play with an animated character at the Academy Museum Studio Ghibli's PONYO media preview in Los Angeles on February 12, 2026.

Oscars museum dives into world of Miyazaki's 'Ponyo'

Los Angeles, United States

With simulated waves, animation tables, and dozens of original sketches on display, a new exhibition in the Oscars museum offers immersion into the aquatic world of "Ponyo," Hayao Miyazaki's cinematic classic.

The Academy Museum of Motion Pictures opened in 2021 with a retrospective dedicated to the grand master of Japanese animation.

Nearly five years later, dozens of drawings, storyboards and other elements created for the film and gifted to the Los Angeles institution by Miyazaki's world-famous Studio Ghibli are going on display.

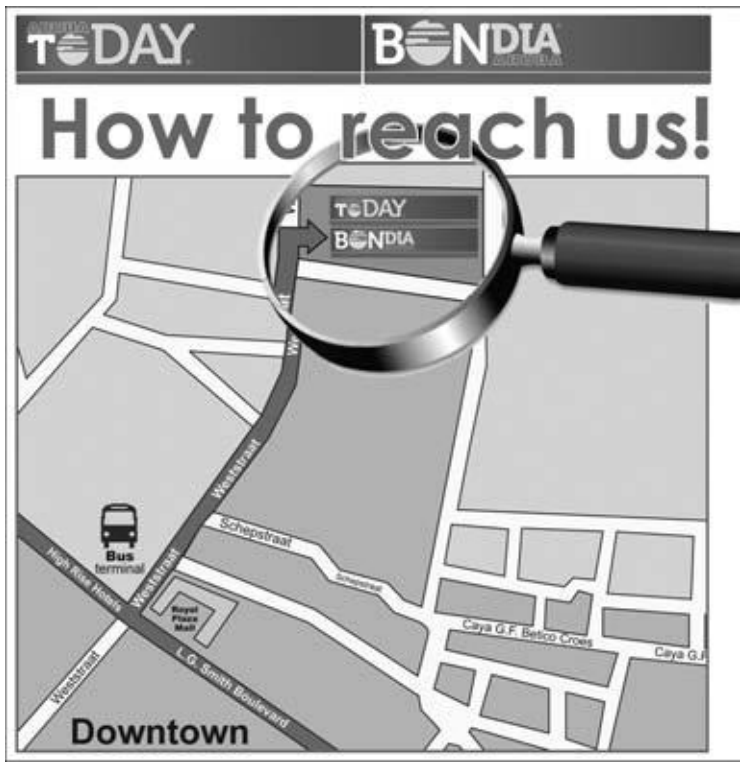
"It's such a treasure to have, we should share it with our visitors," the exhibit's curator, Jessica Niebel, told AFP.

The museum has dedicated over 350 square meters (nearly 3,800 square feet) to the magical 2008 movie.

Inspired by the Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale "The Little Mermaid," Miyazaki's story centers around a goldfish with a girl's face who is rescued by a five-year-old boy, Sosuke.

Despite the reluctance of her father, the underwater wizard Fujimoto, little Ponyo falls in love with her new friend and gives up her magical powers to become human.

Entirely hand drawn, the film was hailed as a visual masterpiece marking Miyazaki's return to the traditional animation of his early career, after incorporating computer generated images in "Spirited Away" and "Howl's Moving Castle."❑



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ARUBA TODAY NEWS

Senegal's Sahad, radiant champion of 'musical pan-Africanism'

Dakar, Senegal

With exhilarating charisma, stage energy and impassioned lyrics, Senegalese musician Sahad has created a unique body of work from a kaleidoscope of influences, culminating in his new pan-African album.

At the heart of Sahad Sarr's ingenuity lies a quest for independence, his pride in being African and a deep connection to Senegal, where he leads a number of projects meant to show young people that it is possible to dream big in the country.

A songwriter, guitarist, singer and founder of his eponymous band SAHAD, the musician has been called the "Senegalese James Brown".

Even if some say there is a touch of Nigerian Afrobeat pioneer Fela Kuti in his trance-like rhythms or a hint of Mali music legend Ali Farka Toure, Sahad's sound is unique.

In his ten years of work, he has become a leading figure in Senegal's alternative music scene, demonstrating [illegible] homegrown Mbalax style.

"The major record labels in Africa, Europe and the United States have always had trouble defining my music", Sahad, 37, told AFP.

Senegalese artist Sahad Sarr performs in front of a small audience at a shop in Dakar, on February 5, 2026.

"I make jazz fusion mixed with Afrobeat, funk, and traditional rhythms from Senegal, Mali and the Serer people", he said, referring to the ethnic community from which he hails.

He says his music is influenced by Miles Davis, John Coltrane and James Brown, explaining that he considers his style "kaleidoscopic".

In recent years he has performed with his band around the world and will represent Senegal at the international jazz music event "jazzahead!" in Bremen, Germany in April.

His latest album "African West Station" is a remarkable work of "musical pan-Africanism", the culmination of four years of research into the archives of post-independence west African music from the 1960s to '80s.

- West African imagination -

"It was important to make an album that recounts the history of all these socio-cultural and political movements, these struggles that have brought us to where we are today", Sahad told AFP.

He emphasised that he wanted "to create a fusion to showcase west African collective imagination" with sounds from Guinea, Mali, Nigeria and Ghana.

The album is meant as a "decolonial plea and a project for unity, where music plays an essential role because it transcends borders."

At the end of January Sahad and his band, who are from Congo, Ivory Coast, Benin and Senegal, delivered a high-energy show at the Institut Francais in Dakar.

As a passionate bandleader, Sahad was not just on vocals but also guitar and percussion.

In "Ya Bon" he criticised current and past African heads of state who he says have maintained a "servile relationship with the coloniser".

In "We Can Do" he aims to inspire youth to build connections, and in his galvanising "Ndakaaru" he celebrates the city of Dakar.

- 'New generation' -

A few days after the concert AFP met with Sahad at his home studio in Dakar.

"There's a new generation in Africa, of which Im a part, that's demanding a certain freedom, identity, and authenticity, and that also wants to rethink the image portrayed of Africa and Africans," he said.

In the album "we advocate for a youth free from hang-ups, a cultural reappropriation, a new relationship with the world" he said.

He added that he has often been offended by "people who have cliches about African music, who expect Africa to produce a certain type of sound" via instruments such as the kora or percussion. ❑

ARUBA TODAY

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Kristen Bell returns to host glitzy Actor Awards in Hollywood

Los Angeles, United States

Kristen Bell returns to host Hollywood's premier acting awards next month for the third time with a single goal: to entertain everyone equally.

U.S. actress Kristen Bell attends the 83rd annual Golden Globe Awards at the Beverly Hilton hotel in Beverly Hills, California, on January 11, 2026.

In a country riven by polarization, the actress says her role fronting the Actor Awards previously called the SAG Awards is just like hosting in your own home.

"If I invite you over for dinner, I make a nice meal. I put placemats out. I say, keep your shoes on. No big deal," Bell told AFP.

"I do those things to make you feel welcome, and I hope you have a good experience. That's a host's job."

The star of "Nobody Wants This" said part of the challenge when designing segments or writing jokes for a show like this is to "create ideas that match or elevate what you've done previously."

But gauging the mood of your audience is critical.

"You have to be mindful and conscientious," she said, noting that last year's hosting gig in the shadow of deadly fires that devastated Los Angeles was a case in point.

Bell is careful to avoid direct reference to President Donald Trump, whose presence looms over Hollywood award shows and who is not averse to making his feelings known about hosts he does not like. ❑

Thunder strike from long range to halt Cavs' seven-game win streak

Los Angeles, United States

The Oklahoma City Thunder drilled 21 three-pointers in a 121-113 victory over Cleveland on Sunday that halted the Cavaliers' seven-game NBA winning streak.

Isaiah Joe scored 22 points and Cason Wallace added 20 points and 10 assists for the short-handed Thunder, who improved their Western Conference-leading record to 44-14 despite the absence of injured starters Shai Gilgeous-Alexander and Jalen Williams as well as Ajay Mitchell and Alex Caruso.

"It's a lot of fun just getting the ball rolling," said Wallace, who had just one turnover and excelled in a tough assignment of guarding James Harden.

"Early game, so we tried to get our legs into it right from the jump. I feel like we came out and we had a little bit of momentum early in the game," added Wallace after a contest in which the Thunder scored the first nine points and led by as many as 23 in the first quarter.

The teams traded the lead in the third, but Oklahoma City took the lead into the fourth and did not relinquish it.

Seven Thunder players scored in double figures, with center Chet Holmgren contributing a 17-point, 15-rebound double-double.

Chet Holmgren #7 of the Oklahoma City Thunder rebonds during the first half against the Cleveland Cavaliers at Paycom Center on February 22, 2026 in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Harden and Donovan Mitchell scored 20 points apiece for Cleveland.

In San Francisco, Golden State's Brandin Podziemski scored 15 of his 18 points in the fourth quarter as the Warriors beat the Denver Nuggets 128-117.

Podziemski added 15 rebounds and nine assists, helping the Warriors withstand Denver star Nikola Jokic's 19th triple-double of the season.

Jokic scored 35 points with 20 rebounds and 12 assists and Jamal Murray added 21 for the Nuggets, who were coming off a 54-point win over Portland but never led in the first half.

They asserted themselves after the break against a Golden State team missing not only injured Stephen Curry and Jimmy Butler but also ailing Kristaps Porzingis and Draymond Green ruled out late with lower back trouble.

Denver were up by five midway through the fourth quarter but the Warriors, with Podziemski leading the way, surged home on a 17-8 scoring run.

"He was brilliant, and we needed it," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said of Podziemski, whose efforts backed up a 23-point performance from teammate Moses Moody.

- Celtics top Lakers -

Boston star Jaylen Brown's 32 points, eight rebounds and seven assists propelled the Celtics to a 111-89 victory over the Lakers in Los Angeles. The latest game in the historic rivalry turned into a rout, the Lakers pulling their starters after Payton Pritchard drilled a step-back three-pointer to push the Celtics' lead to 22 points with 3:24 remaining.

Pritchard scored 30 points off the bench, making six of the Celtics' 14 three-pointers as Boston, second in the Eastern Conference, notched their ninth win in 11 games.

Luka Doncic scored 25 points and LeBron James added 20 for the Lakers, who were held to their second-lowest point total of the season.

Even in defeat, superstar James hit another NBA milestone. The league's scoring leader, playing in his 1,600th regular-season game, surpassed 43,000 career points.

Elsewhere, the Dallas Mavericks halted their 10-game losing streak with a 134-130 victory over the Indiana Pacers. Khris Middleton scored 25 points, P.J. Washington added 23 and six Mavs players scored in double figures.

The Toronto Raptors, fueled by 32 points from Immanuel Quickley, beat Milwaukee 122-94 to end the Bucks' three-game winning streak. Kevin Porter Jr. and Ryan Rollins scored 21 points each for Milwaukee, who were again without star Giannis Antetokounmpo because of a calf strain.❑

Skier Vonn's Italian hospital a hotbed of men, sister says

Rome, Italy

An Italian doctors' association on Friday praised US ski star Lindsey Vonn's sister for recognising the "beauty" of Italian emergency room medical staff after she posted some humorous advice on social media.

In a short video accompanied by a love song, Vonn's younger sister Karin Kildow advised her followers to "delete your dating apps and just go to an Italian emergency room".

Her post was from the Italian hospital where Vonn underwent four operations on the leg she fractured in a horrific crash at the Winter Olympics.

Various male doctors or nurses in green scrubs are seen in the video on Kildow's Instagram handle. They can be seen talking, walking down the halls, or writing in medical files, with the accompanying song "This Will Be (an Everlasting Love)" by Natalie Cole.

"I said there would be a silver lining... In all seriousness shout out to all the truly kind and caring doctors and nurses who helped Lindsey," wrote Kildow.

Vonn, 41, the 2010 Olympic downhill champion who relaunched her career in late 2024, fractured the tibia in her left leg during the women's downhill at the Milan-Cortina Games on February 8, where she hoped to capture the gold.

The fracture -- coming just over a week after she had ruptured the anterior cruciate ligament in her left knee sent Vonn to the Ca' Foncello hospital in the city of Treviso, north of Venice.

Vonn was discharged on Sunday from the hospital and flown home to the United States.

Asked for comment, the president of the Italian Society of Emergency Medicine, Alessandro Riccardi, said he was "delighted that Lindsey Vonn's sister has recognised the beauty that exists in our emergency rooms."

"But we are even more delighted that she has recognised what really matters to us: the competence, professionalism, and profound value of emergency care and our National Health Service," he said in a statement to AFP.❑

(L-R) Karin Kildow and Lindsey Vonn attend as Lindsey Vonn Celebrates 20 Years with Red Bull at Delilah, the night before the ESPYs, on July 15, 2025 in West Hollywood, California.

Nights of Culture, Music, and Entertainment at Paseo Herencia

(ORANJESTAD)—As the sun sets, Paseo Herencia comes alive with entertainment that celebrates Aruba's culture, music, and vibrant energy. The open-air plaza transforms into a lively hub where locals and visitors gather to experience the island's rhythm, sights, and flavors. Evenings at Paseo Herencia invite guests to slow down, connect, and enjoy a mix of music, dance, and immersive experiences in a relaxed, welcoming setting.

This month, we proudly celebrate Dia di Betico, a day honoring the life and legacy of Betico Croes,a key figure in Aruba's journey toward autonomy. A beloved traditional Aruban band will perform live on January 25th from 8:00 pm to 10:00 pm. Known for their authentic rhythms and lively performances, Grupo di Betico brings a strong sense of cultural pride to the plaza, offering both visitors and residents a memorable evening filled with local heritage and island sounds.

Weekly programming ensures that every night offers something new. Cultural Wednesdays celebrate Aruba's musical heritage, starting with steelpan music at 7:00 pm and followed by a cultural dance show at 8:00 pm that highlights traditional movements and storytelling. Saturdays in January are dedicated to Carnaval Nights beginning at 8:00 pm, filling Paseo Herencia with dazzling costumes, lively music, and spirited performances that immerse guests in one of Aruba's most beloved celebrations.

The plaza's entertainment continues with themed nightly water show at 7:30 pm, 8:30 pm, and 9:30 pm, creating a natural transition from live performances into the evening's activities.

For younger visitors, the carousel and kids' train provide joyful, memorable experiences that bring a touch of magic to the plaza. Thrill seekers can also enjoy the Airsoft attraction located behind The Lazy Turtle, ensuring that there is entertainment for all ages.

For those continuing the night, Paseo Herencia offers a variety of vibrant nightlife experiences. Gusto Nightclub is known for high-energy DJ sets, VIP bottle service, and a daily happy hour from 6:00 pm to 10:00 pm. The club brings together locals and visitors for a lively, unforgettable party atmosphere. Frenchie's Karaoke Bar provides a relaxed outdoor setting where guests can take the stage, sing, and perform while enjoying the support of friendly staff and fellow patrons. Flamingoes Bar offers a social all-ages experience with inventive

cocktails, delicious snacks, and a spacious terrace ideal for groups, making it a top choice for music, conversation, and a lively bar vibe.

With stores open daily from 10:00 am to 10:00 pm, visitors can combine shopping, dining, and entertainment into one seamless visit. Parking at Paseo Herencia is complimentary for up to two hours when shopping, dining, or enjoying a movie, simply by presenting a purchase receipt to the parking cashier. Whether visiting for an evening show or staying late into the night, Paseo Herencia offers a complete island experience where music, culture, and entertainment come together to create memorable moments for all ages.❑

Lakers honor championship coach Riley with statue

(L-R) Dwayne Wade, Earvin "Magic" Johnson, Michael Douglas, Chris Rodstrom, former Los Angeles Lakers head coach Pat Riley, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, and Jeanie Buss, attend a ceremony to unveil the statue of former head coach Pat Riley at Crypto.com Arena on February 22, 2026 in Los Angeles, California.

Los Angeles, United States

The Los Angeles Lakers honored legendary coach Pat Riley, mastermind of the team's 1980s "Showtime" era, with a statue outside Crypto.com Arena on Sunday. Riley, a Hall of Fame coach now serving as the Miami Heat's team president, coached the Lakers from 1981 to 1990, taking them to the NBA Finals seven times and winning NBA titles in 1982, 1985, 1987 and 1988.

Now, he's immortalized outside the Lakers' arena in downtown Los Angeles, a bronze likeness of Riley wearing one of his favorite Armani suits and with one fist raised ranged alongside statues of Lakers greats Elgin Baylor, Kobe Bryant, Shaquille O'Neal, Jerry West, Magic Johnson and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, as well as beloved broadcaster Chick Hearn.

"I don't know how I got here, but I got here and now there's a statue out there," Riley, 80, said. "I'm so grateful to be honored and to be with those who are the giants that I jumped up on their shoulders and they carried me."

As head coach in Los Angeles, Riley won 533 games, his winning percentage of 73.3 leading all Lakers coaches.

He would go on to coach the Heat to an NBA title, but he cemented his NBA reputation as the architect of the "Showtime" Lakers whose high-octane offense revolutionized the NBA and made the franchise a cultural crossover phenomenon in Hollywood.❑